Soft Targets

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Dedication

For what is delicate and still endures.

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Abstract of Thesis

Soft Targets

The spaces we inhabit between love and resentment, closeness and distance, safety and fear are never fixed; they shift constantly. What is soft is never simply gentle, and what is familiar is never entirely safe. Birthdays are scary.

My work lives in these quiet thresholds where truths begin to surface. My thesis exhibition, *Soft Targets*, gathers multiple bodies of work that collapse the distance between contradiction. The exhibition transforms the familiar into the unfamiliar, inviting dialogue around the subtle oscillations between the mundane and the uncanny. Through ceramic sculpture, found-object installation, printmaking, and fiber art, *Soft Targets* explores how materiality, memory, and emotion intertwine to shape stories of place, trauma, and transformation.

Grounded in personal experience, *Soft Targets* emerges from a lifelong negotiation of duality, shaped by the mirrored identity of being a fraternal twin and the divided geography of growing up with divorced parents in separate houses. These early structures of sameness and separation inform both my approach and the work's engagement with contradiction: how tenderness can carry threat, how care can become burden, and how what is fragile, needy, or unraveling may reveal unexpected forms of resilience. Personal anecdotes stitch these works together, offering glimpses into how the intimate and the ordinary can slip into the eerie. In dwelling within these tensions, *Soft Targets* seeks meaning in what remains unresolved, allowing the quiet, uncomfortable truths of intimacy, memory, and identity to emerge through material and form.

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Introduction

Soft Targets unfolds as an installation rather than a sequence of discrete works. The exhibition space operates as a domestic environment that has been subtly destabilized: a bed, a cabinet, a table, a chair, and suspended textiles appear familiar at first glance, but upon closer inspection, each object falters. The viewer moves through the space not as a passive observer, but as a body navigating a set of emotional and material contradictions. The installation does not follow a linear path. Instead, it invites a circular drifting. The various works are arranged to echo one another across the space. These groupings are not to be viewed as isolated sections, but interdependent. Together, these bodies of work create a spatial and conceptual loop in which no single piece can be understood in isolation. There is no start, there is no end.

The term “soft target” originates in the language of military strategy, used to describe a person or place that is unprotected and easily harmed. It often refers to civilian spaces: homes, schools, gatherings, sites of everyday life. In this context, softness is framed as weakness, as exposure, as risk. This exhibition reclaims and complicates that definition. Here, softness is not only a condition of vulnerability, but also a necessary state for intimacy, care, and perception. To be soft is to feel, to remain open, to be affected by the world.

Throughout the installation, softness and threat are placed in close proximity. Guns become plush and collapsible. Dresses become sites of memory and loss. Cakes harden into permanence. Animals hover between play and panic. These transformations do not resolve contradiction; they sustain it. The work asks what it means to live within

systems that promise safety while producing fear, that offer care while embedding harm. It considers how domestic spaces, familial structures, and cultural rituals shape our understanding of protection, often long before we are able to question them. By situating the viewer inside this environment, *Soft Targets* emphasizes that vulnerability is not an abstract condition, but a lived experience. The installation becomes a site where the boundaries between comfort and danger, self and other, past and present begin to blur. What emerges is not a fixed narrative, but a set of tensions that must be held simultaneously.

Figure 1: *Soft Targets,* mixed media installation, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

Chapter 1: the Soft Gun

My first encounter with a gun happened when I was a child, in what I called the "music room". My mother filled the space with instruments, antiques, and warm afternoon light. I spent hours there, sprawled across the carpet, letting my imagination drift through the glass-front cabinets. One winter afternoon, I saw a glint beneath the couch. Convinced I had found my mother's hidden stash of presents, I reached into the shadows, brushing dust until my fingers met metal. I pulled the object into the light and found myself holding a gun.

Startled, I ran to my mother. She froze before explaining that it had belonged to her biological father, who had recently passed and left her his gun collection. She told me it was unloaded, unable to hurt anyone, yet I felt its presence fill the house with a quiet, unspoken weight. Not long after, the guns disappeared. I did not think much of them again until a decade later, when my own biological father died.

The day after his death, my siblings and I sifted through piles of paperwork, trying to understand what he wanted in the end. Amid the chaos, one of the first things we found in a banker's box labeled "important" was a concealed-carry license. I never knew he owned a gun. Suddenly, I was transported back in time, reaching under the couch, expecting something soft and finding something else entirely. In the days that followed, it felt as though every drawer, every box, every shadow in his house might be hiding a gun.

Those two encounters form the root of *this will not protect you* (2026) and *gun cabinet* (2025). This body of work contends with the cultural tensions and inherited

histories that shape ideas of safety, masculinity, conflict, and growing up in the South. Each pillow gun sculpture is sewn from familiar textures, worn sheets from childhood bedrooms, pastels reminiscent of domestic comfort. The bed functions as both a childlike refuge and an adult site of concealed fear. It references the way children hoard toys under their pillows for comfort, while gun owners often hide weapons in the same place for protection. In this overlap, *this will not protect you* insists we ask ourselves how notions of safety are learned, rehearsed, and absorbed long before we understand their stakes. The installation invites touch, even affection, while their motifs resist it. In this tension, these guns ask: what does it mean to take comfort in the image of violence?

A gun, an object designed for control and destruction, becomes tender, collapsible, and safe enough to spoon. The irony is not humorous; it is intimate. Within the domestic sphere, the gun arrives under the promise of protection, yet its presence introduces risk into the very space meant for rest. By translating the weapon into fabric, the work exposes the fragile logic that equates harm with safety. The plush gun does not mock the original object. It mourns the belief that violence can safeguard intimacy. The irony lies in this misalignment between intention and outcome: what is meant to protect may in fact endanger, and what appears soft may reveal the deepest instability.

The work is shaped by my experience living in the American South, where guns are deeply woven into the rituals of daily life. They are inherited as heirlooms, displayed as symbols of pride, tucked quietly under pillows and bedside drawers. By translating guns into soft domestic forms, the work mirrors this tension, revealing how Southern traditions surrounding firearms are often stitched together with threads of nostalgia, danger, and denial.

Rendered in sagging fabric, the gun's authority collapses, and attempts to be destroyed. It droops, folds, and caves under its own weight. Red threads fraying from the seams resemble veins or wounds, a trace of someone's care, or the unraveling of protection itself. This weapon does not threaten; it aches. It embodies the impossible wish to pin down what hurts us, in this case perhaps to cradle danger until it no longer feels dangerous. It lingers in that contradiction, where love and threat, tenderness and harm, blur into the same embrace. While I do not desire to own a gun, I do not wish to stand outside this logic only to condemn it. I empathize with the fear that makes a gun feel necessary, especially within the current cultural landscape, while also understanding that fear does not absolve the contradiction.

Figure 2: *this will not protect you,* queen sized mattress, sewn pillow gun made from secondhand sheets, secondhand pillows and comforter, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

this will not protect you (2026) names the central contradiction of owning a gun: the persistent belief that harm can function as care. The title directly refuses the promise guns make when they enter the domestic sphere as tools of safety, inheritance, and protection. Rather than offering security, the gun introduces vigilance and the constant potential for violence into spaces meant for rest and intimacy. The desire to protect one's family is sincere. In many Southern households, a gun in the bedroom is framed as responsibility, preparedness, even love. I understand that impulse. Yet the same object meant to safeguard also carries the possibility of irreversible harm. The contradiction is intimate and quiet, embedded in nightstands and heirlooms, absorbed long before its consequences are fully reckoned with.

By placing a soft weapon in a bed, I do not mock that belief, rather I expose its fragility. The sagging fabric, drooping barrel, and visible red seams collapse the gun's authority, transforming it from an emblem of control into an object that appears wounded, exhausted, or in need of care itself. The bed, a site of childhood refuge, adult intimacy, and bodily vulnerability, becomes unsettled. Even rendered plush, the gun alters the atmosphere. It suggests that comfort built around the presence of violence cannot fully deliver the peace it promises.

Figure 3: *gun cabinet,* secondhand doll house, sewn pillow guns made from secondhand sheets, stickers, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Working in tandem with the first installation is *gun cabinet* (2025). In this work, a dollhouse frame is soft-edged and domestic, familiar in scale and sentiment, yet its interior is crowded with plush guns. The cabinet door is deliberately left open, mirroring the uneasy permeability of both locked gun shelves and complicated family dynamics. At first glance, the structure resembles a childhood toy, something designed for play, covered in stickers and scratches as evidence of love. Inside, however, the guns are arranged in quiet formation, their fabric bodies mimicking the rigid choreography of

weapon storage. The open door unsettles the scene: protection becomes performative, and the simple act of opening or closing becomes a metaphor for what families choose to reveal, conceal, or pass on. Together with the bed, the cabinet forms a domestic duet. One work staging the intimacy of hidden danger, the other the unease of its visibility.

At its core, both works operate through tragic domestic irony. A gun, an object designed for control and destruction, becomes tender, collapsible, and safe enough to hold or snuggle. Its plushness appears to neutralize its threat, yet the gesture of holding it echoes a child clutching a toy for comfort. It questions the fragile logic that equates proximity to violence with security. The softness exposes how easily comfort and control become entangled. In this intervention, comfort becomes suspect. The irony lies not only in the softness of the weapon, but in our instinct to seek safety in what endangers us. For many, the safety a gun promises is a mirage: one we are taught to trust, even as it turns to dust in our hands.

Chapter 2: *Echoes of Two*

I just miss how it felt standing next to you,

wearing matching dresses before the world was big.

- *Girlpool*, "Before the World was Big" (2015)

My sister Chloe and I are fraternal twins. When you are young and have a twin, all you want is to be separate, to be seen as two individual entities. But alas, being a twin means always being measured against someone else, even when no one is intentionally trying to compare you. People often spoke about us in plurals: the girls, the twins, the sisters. Individuality feels urgent, like something you have to dig out with your own hands. As I get older, I find myself wanting to return to that sameness, to the comfort of being mirrored.

Unlike identical twins, fraternal twins develop from two separate eggs, fertilized by two different sperm in the same pregnancy.[1] Because of this, my sister and I are genetically no more similar than any other siblings. What makes us twins is not biological sameness, but the fact that we shared a womb and were born at the same time (well within the same hour). When we were young, so much of us was the same: our faces, our eyes, our hair. Even before I could walk, my mother lovingly dressed us in matching, ornate outfits, with eyelet trim, hand sewn lace, and cross-stitched emblems, as if keeping us aligned could preserve a moment before differences took hold. And yet, as

[1] National Human Genome Research Institute. "Fraternal Twins." *Talking Glossary of Genomic and Genetic Terms*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2026.

with a lot of fraternal twins, differences arrived anyway. We had different last names, a quiet but permanent marker of separation. Chloe was confident and certain, a spitfire. I was quieter and unsure. I like to think those same differences have quietly carried into our adult lives.

What does it mean to be assigned sameness when you are fundamentally different?

Figure 4:*...wearing matching dresses before the world was big (detail),* secondhand dresses and bedsheets, red thread, fabric cyanotype, sheer fabric, toddler shoes, dirt, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

Being a twin means learning early that closeness and distance exist at the same time. One of my earliest memories of this tension happened when I was three or four years old. My sister and I both had long blonde hair that reached the small of our backs.

That meant from behind, you could rarely tell us apart. One night I decided that the only way to become an individual was to cut my hair off. After everyone went to sleep, I took my mother's sewing shears and cut my hair above my ears. I hid the strands behind the curtains, convinced that if I could not see them, no one else would either. I woke up with a jagged pixie cut and the sinking feeling that I had done something irreversible. That same intuitive scrappiness lives in my work. I sew messily, leaving seams exposed and using red thread that refuses to disappear. I sculpt quickly and without polish. I finish ceramics by dripping glaze with my hands instead of smoothing it away. My practice carries the same urgency and risk as that childhood act: an insistence on marking difference, on asserting presence, even if the result is uneven or imperfect.

Figure 5: *snip snip,* secondhand bedsheet, eyelet trim, shears, red thread, hair, sheer fabric, tutu, red ribbon, secondhand hanger, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

Snip snip (2026) highlights this act directly. Hair is forever preserved in an eyelet lined fabric frame, with a pair of the same shears used hanging from it. The hanging shears act as punctuation within the work, emphasizing the sense of finality in cutting hair. Hair does grow back, but it is never truly the same.

This act marked a kind of death: the death of enforced sameness, a cut to the tie that bound us together. The idea of hair preservation additionally references a Victorian tradition of mourning: making art from human hair. Hair art has roots in the 17th and 18th century, where saving hair for future use in jewelry or other commemorative crafts was common. The idea was that while flesh and bones degrade over time, hair keeps its shape and color for decades. Artwork made from "...hair and wire reflects an intimate connection between the artist and the absent subject that acted as both portrait and talisman of a relationship.[2]"

[2] Meier, Allison. "The Curious Victorian Tradition of Making Art from Human Hair." *Artsy*, 2018.

Figure 6*: I just miss how it felt standing next to you…,* sheer fabric, secondhand bedsheet, cross-stitched scrap fabric, found polaroid, red thread, sewing needle, red ribbon, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

I just miss how it felt standing next to you… (2025), once again echoes the memory of hiding my hair behind the curtain. The curtain transforms into a liminal structure, suspended between past and present, concealment and exposure. Behind the curtain hangs a fabric window, holding a stitched Polaroid of my sister and me, closely snuggled together and forever fixed in time. Cross-stitch becomes a place to hold memory and loss, while also quietly referencing the dresses we once wore: objects made slowly, lovingly, meant to be outgrown. The red thread, not just in these works but all my works, functions as a visible wound, a vein, and a tether. It refuses invisibility. Unlike

traditional sewing meant to disappear into the object, the red thread announces itself. It marks where something has been joined, repaired, or held together under tension. In the context of being a twin, the red thread becomes a line of connection: an umbilical cord, a ponytail, a muddy shoe, or a loose thread hanging from a matching dress.

Figure 7:*...wearing matching dresses before the world was big,* secondhand dresses and bedsheets, red thread, fabric cyanotype, sheer fabric, toddler shoes, dirt*,* 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

…wearing matching dresses before the world was big (2026), returns to those dresses directly and completes the full lyric. Two matching dresses are sewn with that same red thread onto a pink quilt, with a cyanotype of the same dress motif beneath them. The repetition reflects the passage of time: what was once worn, then remembered, then flattened into image. The dress becomes both artifact and echo, something that no longer fits but still shapes the body that remembers it. In this way, the cyanotype technique mirrors memory itself, a liminal space between now and then.

Having studied psychology before becoming an artist, I carry a scientist's curiosity into my practice. In cyanotype printing, light-sensitive solutions of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide react under ultraviolet light. Exposure reduces iron (III) into iron (II), which then combines with ferricyanide to form the iconic Prussian blue pigment that defines the image. After a timed exposure in sunlight, water removes unused iron salts, fixing the blue image permanently on the surface. This chemical reaction is irreversible once developed.[3]

The way I see it, the process of cyanotype printing mirrors the way memories are formed in the brain. Our experiences are encoded as patterns of activity across networks of neurons, which are then stabilized over time through synaptic and systems consolidation, moving them from short-term to long-term storage.[4] Just as a cyanotype must be exposed, washed, and fixed to reveal an image that can no longer be altered, memory formation involves a series of changes that leaves past experience as a trace within the brain. The final image on fabric and the consolidated memory are both impressions of experience, shaped by interactions that cannot be undone.

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[3] Bagnall, Laura. "Cyanotypes: The Origins of Photography." *Royal Botanic Gardens*. 2023.
[4] National Foundation for Cleveland Clinic. "Memory: What It Is, How It Works & Types." *Cleveland Clinic*, 2024.

The lyric “I just miss how it felt standing next to you, wearing matching dresses before the world was big” [5] names what I struggle to hold onto and is referenced directly in the titles of these works. We did stand next to each other. We did wear matching dresses. The world was not big yet. As we age, the world expands, and the sameness that once defined us dissolves. We are no longer adorned with choices made for us. We must exist as our own people, and in doing so, we move farther apart. What remains is the longing. For closeness, for reflection, for the feeling of being side by side before distance became inevitable.

Figure 8: *locket*, secondhand sheets, red thread, fabric cyanotype, sheer fabric, secondhand brass lockets, safety pins, *matia* 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

[5] Girlpool. *Before the World Was Big*. Wichita Recordings, 2015. Audio recording.

The final piece in this series, *locket* (2026), depicts my sister and I enclosed within a cyanotype locket, an object meant to hold something precious close to the body. Surrounding the large cyanotype is an accumulation of brass lockets, hung with safety pins. The locket becomes a site of preservation rather than return: a way of keeping proximity without collapsing difference. Hidden within the sea of lockets are two *mati*, or "evil eyes," also hung with safety pins, a direct reference to how my mother taught my sister and I to always carry *mati*, hung off of a safety pin and hidden within an item of clothing. Like the Greek *mati*, the lockets function as intimate vessels for memory and care. The work acts as a resolution, acknowledging that closeness now lives as memory and artifact, something we keep near not to undo distance, but to honor what once fit so easily side by side.

What does it mean to be assigned sameness when you are fundamentally different? It means learning early that identity can be externally constructed. It means understanding that perception can precede self-awareness. Twinhood, in this sense, becomes rehearsal for broader systems of assigned identity, particularly for young girls. Femininity, like twinhood, often arrives pre-scripted: how to look, how to behave, how to relate. You are grouped before you are known. You are compared before you are understood.

As adults, my sister and I no longer resemble one another in obvious ways. We have different characteristics, different trajectories, different expressions of self, and yet the longing for that earlier closeness persists. We long to be closer, to move through the same experiences again. Currently I would consider us close, especially after the loss of our father, and yet we exist very distinctly as separate people. The work does not attempt

to collapse difference back into sameness. Instead, it honors the complexity of being shaped by both. Twinhood becomes a metaphor for living inside contradiction: to be singular and plural, autonomous and entangled, distinct yet permanently marked by proximity.

Chapter 3: *Clayke*

"Like everyone else we've met who has returned to New Orleans, they were very calm as they recounted the disaster they had experienced. I suppose we're all getting used to it, losing houses. After the couple had left with our sympathy, the four of us and the twins ate the simple but absolutely delicious meal with another bottle of the Pomerol. Our friends confessed that they have had the same reaction to what's happened as Marsha and I: they feel as if a whole new set of possibilities has opened up for them. They have no intention of slipping back into their old lives without making conscious decisions about what they want their future to be. Their two older sons joined us for dessert, and we opened a bottle of port, toasting that future, whatever it may be, while the twins went around the table, making wishes and blowing out the candles in front of each of us"

- *John Biguenet*, "Drinking the Wine Before it Spoils" (2005)

Candles and wishes have always been a tradition in my family. From as early as I can remember, there was an understanding that a birthday was not complete until the lights dimmed and a small, trembling flame appeared. The candle marked time, another year survived, another breath held before making a wish. I learned early how to close my eyes tightly, how to concentrate, and how to believe that wanting something badly enough might make it real. But even then, and very much now, birthdays sometimes feel less like celebrations, and more like thresholds. What we wish for is not always something easily granted. Sometimes the wish is for safety, for stability, for the hope that nothing will change too quickly. Sometimes the wish is simply to make it through what comes next or to know what is to come. Each candle adds another marker, another quiet reminder that you are moving closer to something unknown.

The beginning of this chapter, contains an excerpt from *Drinking the Wine Before It Spoils* (2005), an article written by a close family friend. In the piece, I appear as a child, in tandem with my sister of course, among adults eating dinner together, navigating loss in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which had a profound effect on New Orleans and in turn my upbringing. I was only three at the time, and my memory of those days is heavily fragmented. I do not recall much about it myself, but my mother fills in the gaps when I ask. She tells me stories, shows me pictures, but it is something she generally does not like to discuss. For her and many alike, it was highly traumatic. After a month or two of displacement, my family returned to New Orleans. The city we had known was forever changed: our house badly flooded, walls blackened with water and mold, floors warped. Personal belongings were destroyed, trinkets and furniture reduced to remnants,

only slightly resembling what they previously were. From the way my mom discusses it, returning home was not a return at all. It was stepping into a space that was familiar only in shape, not in substance.

I think it is important to note that Hurricane Katrina was not simply a storm, but one of the most devastating and politically revealing disasters of the twenty-first century. Levee failures, delayed federal response, and mass displacement exposed deep racial and economic inequities embedded in both New Orleans and in the southern United States at large. Black communities in particular bore the brunt of the flooding, the loss of generational homes, and the slow pace of recovery. [6] My family evacuated and was able to return. We had a place to go. Our house was not near the levee system. That ability, to leave, to come back, to rebuild, was shaped by race and class in ways I did not understand as a child. I acknowledge the privilege that allowed my family to return.

At the end of this excerpt, my sister and I move from person to person, making wishes and blowing out candles, even as the city around us remains broken, houses burned, power unreliable, and futures uncertain. [7] The gesture is almost absurd in its tenderness. Candles are lit even when everything else feels fragile. Wishes are made even when there is no guarantee they will come true. That scene has stayed with me: a reminder that ritual does not erase fear, but it gives us something to hold while existing inside it.

[6] Brinkley, Douglas. *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
[7] Biguenet, John. "Drinking the Wine Before It Spoils." *New York Times.* 2005.

Figure 9: *birthdays are scary (installation),* framed risograph prints, claykes, gloop glaze, ceramic party hat, ribbon, table, chair, secondhand crochet blanket, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

This installation is centered around a series of five cakes. Each one carries a wish, iced onto it like a confession, rather than an ask: *I wish you were nice to me* (2026). *I wish I didn't feel like this* (2026). *I wish I knew what is next* (2026). *I wish I could* (2026). *I wish I wasn't* (2026). They do not perform celebrations. These are not wishes to be granted. They are incomplete, fragile, and unresolved, mirroring the moment just before the candles go out. I call these sculptures claykes, a portmanteau that fuses clay and cake. The word is intentionally awkward: slightly playful, slightly clinical. It signals that these objects occupy an in-between state.

Rather than of sponge or plush, these claykes are made from ceramic with crusty pastel glaze and red paint frosting, mirroring what a cake is, without actually performing it correctly. What should be edible, temporary, and shared becomes heavy, enduring, permanent and impossible to consume. The crackle glaze fractures their surfaces, as evidence of stress, drying, and cooling. The cakes are staged sporadically around the room, mimicking the passage of time, cyclical and circular.

Figure 10: *Soft Targets (detail 1),* mixed media installation, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

Alongside one of the claykes is a pink party hat, also made from clay. It is stiff and weighty, incapable of play. What is meant to be light, disposable, and worn briefly becomes burdensome, something you could not balance on your head for long without the weight becoming all consuming. Together, the claykes and the hat stage a celebration

that cannot move forward. The ritual remains intact, but its promise has collapsed, leaving only the weight of wanting and the quiet tension of pretending otherwise.

Figure 11: *birthdays are scary (chair),* framed risograph print, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Above the claykes are three framed risograph prints. The prints each depict a scene in black and white, with a pop of magenta highlighting one particular object. In *birthdays are scary (chair)* (2025), a single plastic lawn chair sits washed in bright blush, set in a patch of uneven grass. The image feels suspended between before and after, either just prior to a gathering or long after everyone has gone. A chair is shaped for a body; it

implies presence, participation, and a witness, and yet here it holds none. Its emptiness becomes the focus. The chair suggests that narrowing, the way celebration can compress the world to a single seat, a single body, a single year, a single day.

Figure 12: *birthdays are scary (termite tent),* framed risograph print, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

In *birthdays are scary (termite tent)* (2025), what first appears to be an electric pink bouncy house is actually a home sealed beneath a fumigation tent. In New Orleans, termites thrive in the humid climate, feeding on the wood of raised historic houses and often hollowing structures from within. When a house is tented, it is wrapped in a sealed

tarp and filled with gas that penetrates the beams and walls, killing the colony inside. The brightly striped covering feels strangely celebratory, even playful, yet it signals infestation and structural threat. The tent conceals damage while publicly announcing it, turning maintenance into spectacle.

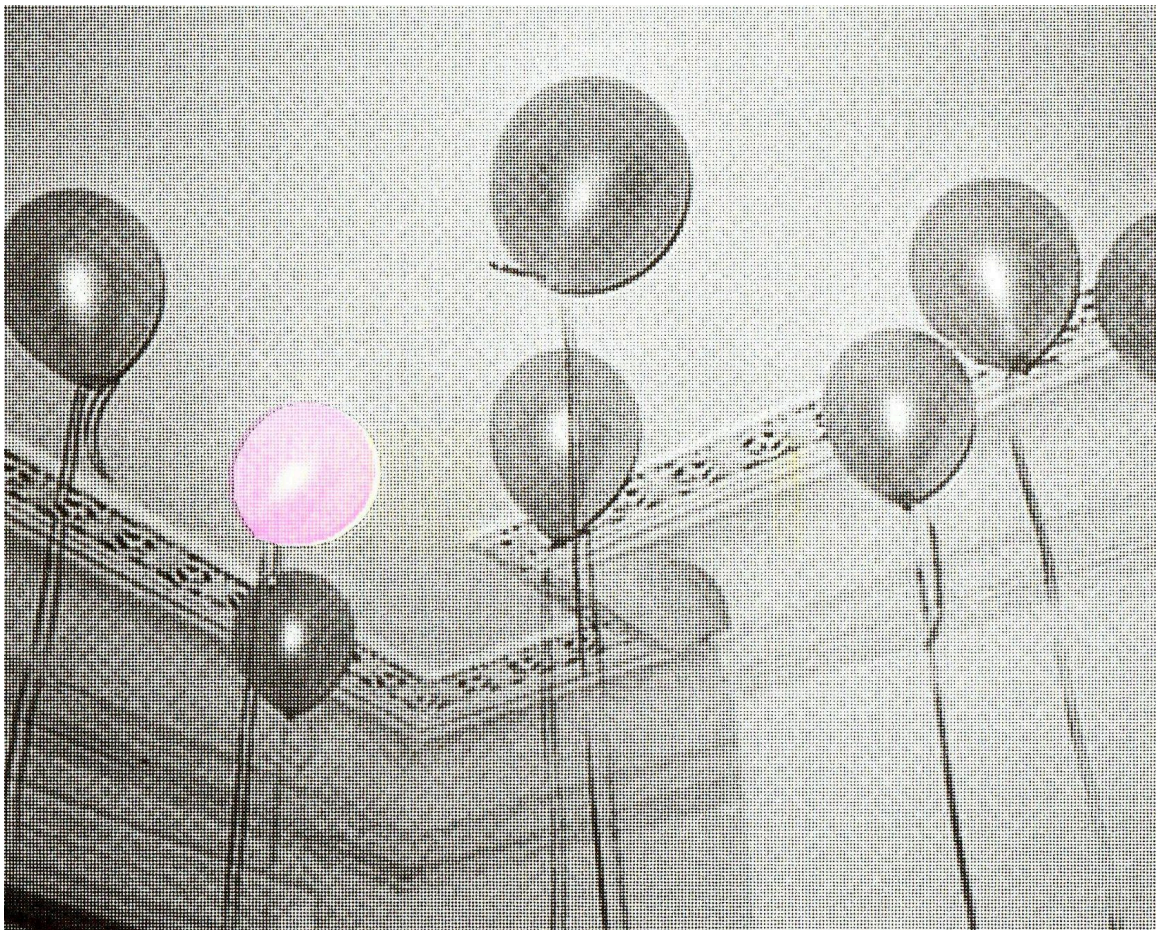

Figure 13: *birthdays are scary (balloon),* framed risograph print, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

birthdays are scary (balloon) (2025) depicts monochrome balloons crowding the frame, their strings hanging taut. They blur into one another, forming a dense field of repetition. A single pink balloon hovers slightly off-center, luminous and exposed. When

I was a child, my mother banned balloons from our house; as a doctor, she had treated multiple children who suffocated on them. What was meant to signal celebration carried, for her, the memory of emergency and loss. That knowledge lingered in our home, and balloons, so often shorthand for joy, still hold a charge of danger for me.

Risograph printing is used intentionally here due to its inherent instability. The process layers separate color drums that rarely align with perfect precision, producing soft misregistration where edges slip and overlap. This slight offset makes the forms appear to tremble, as if vibrating at a different frequency from the page itself. That instability reinforces the emotional tone of the series: celebration edged with anxiety, brightness edged with fragility. The prints feel mechanically reproduced yet subtly unsettled, allowing the images to hover between crisp graphic clarity and a kind of nervous shimmer.

Chapter 4: *Predator-prey*

I have always been high-strung**.** For me, anxiety is not an occasional visitor, but something embedded in my pulse, a constant calibration to the possibility of threat. I move through the world scanning, listening, anticipating. I am tuned to shifts that others might overlook. This vigilance is exhausting, but it is also formative; it shapes how I see, how I feel, how I make. When depicting myself, I often cast myself as prey, creatures that read as harmless, approachable, and soft. However, prey carry their own intelligence: hyperaware, sensitive, surviving, not despite its vulnerability, but because of it. To be soft is to be legible, to announce presence without threat, and to endure in plain sight.

Figure 14: *lunge,* framed risograph print, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

In *lunge* (2025), risograph prints depict three lambs caught mid-leap, framed by vivid magenta stars against a dark, caged background. Their gestures hover between delight and alarm, playful and desperate, repeating the same instinct again and again. The viewer may struggle to tell whether they are jumping for joy or scrambling to escape. The stars act as both spotlight and trap, turning each frozen leap into a test: is safety real, or only imagined? Hypervigilance transforms even small movements into questions. Every step feels like a guess.

Figure 15: *to remain soft anyway,* sheer fabric, secondhand pillowcase and bedsheet, red thread, fabric cyanotype, tulle, safety pins, red ribbon, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

While *lunge* (2025) questions tenderness, *to remain soft anyway* (2026) acts as an acceptance. A lone sheep sleeps, curled in quiet repose, protected by a delicate lattice of barbed wire. The sheep is safe, finally able to rest. Its vulnerability is acknowledged, contained, and honored. The tapestry, made from cyanotype on fabric, mirrors this fragility. Cyanotype is a delicate process: the light-sensitive surface must be carefully exposed and handled, each step requiring attentiveness and care. The delicate nature of worn fabrics, the fragile blue of the cyanotype, and the gentle presence of the sleeping sheep together evoke a space of respite, where alertness may finally yield to rest. The process itself, vulnerable to light, water, and touch, becomes a metaphor for the precariousness of safety and the quiet power in being both exposed and protected.

I embrace the depiction of prey because my fragility is visible, undeniable. My gestures, my curves, my cautiousness speak a language the world understands: I am gentle, I am readable. Softness can invite protection, but it rarely commands respect. It can make one a target: for assumptions, for exploitation, for the quiet violences of the everyday. And yet, within this constant awareness, I have learned there is power in being perceptible, of moving through the world with eyes wide open, heart alert, instincts sharpened. It is not physical power or dominance: it is the resilience, insight, and subtle control that comes from knowing your environment, understanding threat, and navigating exposure with intention. There is power in inhabiting visibility instead of hiding from it. Sensitivity becomes a form of attuned strength.

Chapter 5: *In Conversation*

Within contemporary art, I understand my practice as operating within the lineage of Feminist Craft Theory, as articulated in *The Subversive Stitch*, which positions embroidery and other domestic techniques as sites where gendered labor, authorship, and power are negotiated. Parker's analysis of stitch as both discipline and subversion informs my understanding of making as an embodied, historically loaded act.[8] Building on this framework, artists such as Elaine Reichek mobilize embroidery to question authorship and originality, often appropriating canonical texts to expose the exclusions embedded within art history. In contrast, Annette Messager employs soft materials to construct installations that oscillate between tenderness and threat, implicating the viewer in systems of control, care, and bodily vulnerability. Similarly, Andrea Dezsö uses intricate handwork to trace narratives of migration and inherited trauma, where the act of stitching becomes a means of both preservation and quiet resistance.[9]

In conversation with these practices, I approach softness not as a passive quality but as a structural and conceptual strategy. Red thread functions as a line of tension rather than decoration; secondhand fabric operates as a permeable boundary between protection and exposure; and intuitive, "messy" making becomes a method for processing affect and instability. Like Reichek, I am attentive to the politics of authorship embedded in textile traditions; like Messager, I am invested in the unsettling potential of softness; and like Dezsö, I understand handwork as a carrier of generational memory. My work participates in a broader contemporary movement that collapses the divide between the domestic and

[8] Parker, Rozsika, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010.
[9] Camhi, Leslie. "Let's Get Stitched." *The Village Voice*, 2007.

the political, insisting that materials historically coded as feminine or decorative can articulate complexity, resistance, and criticality within the fine art context.

Chapter 6: *Throughline*

Soft Targets does not aim to mend what is divided, but to dwell within it. It insists that contradiction is the condition under which we live. Across guns, twins, cakes, prey, and ritual, the work returns to the same question: How do systems designed to safeguard us simultaneously shape us into soft targets?

A gun is introduced into a bedroom as safety. A twin is introduced into a life as companionship. A birthday candle is introduced as hope. A dollhouse becomes a gun cabinet. A cake becomes a confession. A sheep becomes a self-portrait. Again and again, something soft is positioned near something threatening. Again and again, protection blurs into vulnerability. The throughline of this exhibition is not simply softness, but exposure. The soft gun collapses under its own weight, revealing the instability of the promise it makes. The twin dresses flatten into image, reminding us that sameness never guarantees unity. The clay cakes harden into permanence, holding wishes that cannot be granted. The lamb lunges without clear direction, caught between play and panic. These gestures do not dramatize violence outright; instead, they illuminate the quiet ways danger coexists with intimacy.

The bedroom space is not a sanctuary in this work, but a stage set for rehearsal. Beds, quilts, party hats, and lockets carry inherited scripts about gender, safety, and care. Growing up in the American South, guns were not abstract political objects but heirlooms and fixtures of normalcy. Protection was gendered. Fear was normalized. Rituals continued even after the catastrophe, the hurricane. In this context, care and harm are never clearly separable. They are stitched together.

In reclaiming the term “soft targets”, the work asks why softness is treated as weakness rather than as evidence of feeling. Softness is coded as feminine, emotional, excessive. It is warned to toughen up, to “buck up”, yet softness is also the condition that makes intimacy possible. It is what allows us to love, to attach, to grieve, to remember, to be alive.

The red thread running visibly through the work becomes both wound and tether, an umbilical line between twins, between past and present, between care and injury. It refuses invisibility. Where traditional craft might conceal repair, this work exposes it. Where domestic objects typically perform reassurance, these objects falter. The cakes crack. The guns sag. The dresses flatten. Each piece holds a tension between fragility and endurance.

If the gun promises control, the soft gun exposes control as just a fantasy.
If the birthday promises hope, the clayke exposes it as a weight.
If twinhood promises unity, the cut hair exposes individuation as loss.
If prey signals weakness, the vigilant animal exposes perception as strength.

Soft Targets ultimately argues that softness is not a liability. To remain soft is not to surrender power, but to claim a different kind of endurance, one rooted in awareness and the refusal to harden in response to harm.

Figure 16: *Soft Targets (detail 2),* mixed media installation, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 17: *Soft Targets (detail 3),* mixed media installation, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

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